Defining the Concept of Terrorism

by

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It is often said that "One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter". This statement illustrates the common diversity of the term terrorism. One person's opinion of what terrorism is may be different than that of another person. So then, what is "terrorism" and how do we define it? The answer to this question depends upon an individual's own perspective of terrorism and how it effects them. The same is true for governments that battle with the threat of terrorist violence on a daily basis.

Webster's Dictionary defines "**terrorism**" as; "the systematic use of terror especially as a means of coercion", and "**terror**" is defined as; "a state of intense fear": "one that inspires fear": "a frightening aspect": "a cause of anxiety": "violence committed by groups in order to intimidate a population or government into granting their demands". This is a general definition of terrorism which can be applied to a wide range of situations, from the school yard bully to an airplane hijacker.

The military definition of terrorism is the one that most accurately fits the traditional model of political terrorism. Terrorism in itself is nothing but a tactic of a larger division of warfare known as "psychological warfare". Psychological warfare operations are composed of strategies designed to assist conventional military tactics in the defeat of an opposing force through psychological means. These tactics are meant to harass, intimidate, instill fear, unbalance, coerce, etc. these opposing forces. Tactics can include propaganda or dis-information operations, sabotage, assassination, kidnaping, bombings, threats of violence, etc. The use of terrorist tactics such as these have been employed by military forces since the beginning of warfare itself. The military concept of terrorism is usually the foundation for the political definition of terrorism used by most governments.

The political definition of terrorism is generally the one that is excepted as the legal standard for the term. This is due to the fact that terrorism must be defined in such a way that the legislation of laws regarding the concept can be created. And even though the political definition is generally the one which becomes the standard, there is not a single global definition of terrorism that can be agreed upon. Different governments, as well as agencies within governments, may define terrorism in similar terms but also in slightly different ways. This too is usually based upon the perspective of the individual government or agency. The United States Government, for example, defines the term "Federal crime of terrorism" as "an offense that is calculated to influence or affect the conduct of government by intimidation or coercion, or to retaliate against government conduct", the term is also defined in further detail regarding the nature of offenses. The Federal Bureau of Investigation defines "terrorism" as "the unlawful use of force or violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives." Both of these definitions have the same basic meaning, they are just worded differently because they are applied in different ways.

In the United States, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's definition of terrorism is generally the one most commonly used by Law Enforcement agencies, as well as the general public. This is not to say that the FBI's definition of terrorism is the absolute, however it does define the basic concept in a simple and concise manner which makes it a very functional definition. It tells us that terrorism is the use of violence against persons or property in the name of political or social objectives. It is important to understand the distinction between the use of violence motivated by political or social reasons, and the use of violence for other reasons. The use of terrorist type violence alone does not qualify as terrorism. A disgruntled ex-employee

who bombs his former employer's building in revenge for being terminated has committed a crime, not an act of terrorism. Violence must be motivated by the furtherance of a political or social agenda before it can be considered an act of terrorism. This political or social element is all important when defining what is, and isn't terrorism. True terrorism is violence perpetrated, by individuals or groups, with the goal of bringing about political or social change within a government or population. All violence committed which lacks this political or social element will be considered "crime".

Terrorism Classifications

International & Domestic Terrorism

Terrorism can be divided into two basic categories; international terrorism and domestic terrorism. Fundamentally, both of these types of terrorism are the same when it comes to the threat they present, tactics and weapons used, motivations, group structures, etc. The difference between international and domestic terrorism is found in geographical location.

International terrorism refers to terrorism that is perpetrated against American interest by groups or individuals that are citizens of a foreign country. These terrorist groups or individuals, along with their motivations and ideologies, will originate and reside abroad. These terrorists generally view America as the enemy and whether they attack an American target in a foreign nation or here in the United States, it will still be classified as an act of international terrorism. International terrorism can include classifications such as; State Directed Terrorism, State Sponsored Terrorism, Narco Terrorism, Single Issue Terrorism, and Religious Terrorism.

Domestic terrorism refers to terrorism that is perpetrated against American interests by Americans. These types of terrorist groups and individuals, along with their motivations and ideologies, originate and reside in the United States. And whether they attack an American target here in the United States or abroad in a foreign country, it will still be classified as domestic terrorism. Domestic terrorism can include classifications such as; Left Wing Terrorism, Right Wing Terrorism, Narco Terrorism, Single Issue Terrorism, and Religious Terrorism.

State Directed Terrorism

State directed terrorism refers to acts of terrorism against American interests perpetrated by groups or individuals operating as agents of a foreign government. This type of terrorism is generally conducted by nations which consider The United States an enemy. These groups or individuals will have received training, support, funding, and operate under the direct control of that government. Such groups or individuals will generally be associated with official military or security forces of the foreign government. The motivations for the use of terrorism by a foreign nation could include retaliation for military action, or political and economic sanctions used against that country.

State Sponsored Terrorism

Terrorist groups or individuals which receive support from a host nation in the form of training, equipment, funding, and a base of operations, are known as being state sponsored. Terrorist groups or individuals in this category operate independently, and not under the control of the host nation. The terrorist group will have no official connection to the host country, but may operate for the country covertly in return for the support provided. Nations which support terrorism may do so for many different groups of varying ideologies simultaneously. The groups themselves may also be receiving support from other nations as well. In return for this support, these groups would be available to conduct terrorist operations for multiple nations,

at the same time advancing their individual group agenda or movement.

Single Issue Terrorism

Single issue terrorism, also known as 'special interest terrorism', is a type of terrorism in which a group or individual commits acts of terrorism in the name of one specific cause or movement. This type of terrorism is most commonly seen associated with causes or movements such as abortion, animal rights, environmental issues, etc. Generally, these groups are solely committed to their causes and don't form alliances with groups representing other social or political causes. Acts of terrorism are generally directed toward corporate or government entities which are viewed as in opposition to the groups movement. These types of terrorist groups or individuals can originate internationally or domestically.

Narco Terrorism

Narco terrorism is violence perpetrated by drug trafficking cartels and organizations. This type of terrorism is primarily directed toward government entities which conduct interdiction operations against the drug organization or toward other drug trafficking organization viewed as competition. These types of terrorist groups or individuals can originate internationally or domestically.

Right Wing Terrorism

Right Wing Terrorism refers to terrorist groups or individuals, who's ideologies and movements are generally anti-government in nature. The focus of this type of terrorism can be single or multi-issue in nature, and can include issues such as anti-taxation, pro-constitutional rights, anti-law enforcement, anti-federal government, etc. These types of groups have been known to form alliances with other groups with similar, or even opposing, ideologies. Groups that are associated with Right Wing movements include; Nazi groups, Hate groups, Anti-tax groups, Militias, etc. Groups with these ideologies can be found operating both internationally and domestically.

Left Wing Terrorism

Left Wing Terrorism refers to terrorist groups or individuals, who's ideologies and movements are generally concerned with social issues. The focus of this type of terrorism is generally single issue in nature, and can include issues such as; anti-abortion, pro-animal rights, pro-environmental, anti-technology, etc. These types of groups may form alliances with other left-wing groups with similar, or even opposing, ideologies. These groups may also be international or domestic.

Religious Terrorism

Religious terrorism is violence perpetrated in the name of some religious doctrine or belief. This type of terrorism can be found associated with groups or individuals from both established mainstream religions, as well as "fringe" religious movements. "Fringe" religions are generally associated with "cults", while other groups are found to be rooted in mainstream Western, Eastern and Middle Eastern religions. Basic examples of this type of terrorism can be found in incidents of violence associated with the anti-abortion movement in the United States, or with Middle Eastern groups who have declared "Jihad"(Holy War) against the United States. Groups or individuals associated with this type of terrorism are found to be very dedicated to their movements and believe they are being directed by the word of God in most cases. This type of terrorism can be both International or Domestic in nature.

Individuals

Acts of terrorism do not necessarily have to be perpetrated by a group. A lone individual terrorist can pose the same level of threat as an entire group. Some consider the threat of terrorism posed by individuals to be greater in some respects than that of groups. This is due to the fact that the movements of individuals are much more difficult to track than that of groups. The individual can harbor and develop his terrorist agenda and planning in total seclusion without the need of outside assistance. We probably will not know of this individual's existence until after a terrorist act has been committed. Individuals engaged in terrorism could range from the professional terrorist who makes his living working for terrorist groups or nations, to the average person living in the average community. Either way, it makes this type of terrorism a very dangerous prospect for any government or civilian population.

The Tactics And Weapons Of Terrorism

The tactics of terrorism are easy to define and include; political assassination, kidnaping, hostage taking, direct armed assaults, armed facility occupations, hijacking of aviation and ground transportation, bombings, industrial sabotage, propaganda and dis-information campaigns, threats of violence, etc. In general, these tactics are meant to destroy, kill, injure, intimidate, coerce, disrupt and unbalance the established enemy and ultimately force that enemy into political or social change.

Any weapon has the potential for use by a terrorist group, however some weapons are used more often than others. Bombs are used in the vast majority of terrorist incidents, making the bomb the number one weapon of choice. Statistics point to bombs being used in over 80% of all terrorist incidents. Bombs are used more frequently than any other weapon for several reasons. Bombs are relatively easy and inexpensive to make, easy to conceal and transport, they can be built to suit specific needs, cause extensive amounts of damage to property, injure large numbers of people at one time, and inflict great fear or psychological terror on the community.

Firearms are the second most widely used weapon of terrorism. Firearms and ammunition are available globally through civilian, military or black market sources. Firearms are easily concealed and transportable, require only minimum skill to operate, and are capable of creating extensive damage both physically and psychologically. We all understand the terror associated with images of a man in a mask carrying an assault weapon.

In addition to bombs and firearms, attention recently has began to focus on what are known as Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). Weapons of Mass Destruction are specifically designed to result in the death or injury to large numbers of people at one time. These Weapons of Mass Destruction fall into four basic categories: Nuclear Weapons, Biological Weapons, Chemical Weapons, and Large Conventional or Improvised Bombs.

Nuclear Weapons pose the greatest threat of potential death and destruction, however their potential for use by terrorists is limited due to several factors. Nuclear weapons, and the raw materials used to make these weapons, are strictly controlled on a global wide basis. They are extremely difficult and expensive to make or acquire, and easily detectable by governments using sophisticated radiological monitoring devices.

Biological weapons pose as great a threat as do nuclear weapons, and their potential for use by terrorist groups is thought to be feasible. Biological weapons incorporate the use of diseases such as Anthrax, Smallpox, Plague, or any other number of biological organisms as weapons. The biological organisms utilized as weapons are available in nature and require only minimal scientific knowledge to produce them

as weapons.

Chemical weapons also pose a high threat for potential use by terrorist groups, but pose less of a threat of damaging effects than do Nuclear or Biological weapons. This is due to the nature of chemical compounds in general. While chemical weapons may have a quicker and more devastating initial effect when used, they don't have the wide spread effect of a biological weapon because they are not communicable agents. There are no "outbreaks" associated with the use of chemical agents, however they can be very lethal and cause extensive contamination at the site of usage. Chemical weapons also do not possess the shear destructive power of a nuclear weapon. The real threat associated with chemical weapons is in the fact that chemicals are available in every community in the United States, making their use as a potential weapon extremely high.

The last category of Weapons of Mass Destruction is large explosive devices. These bombs may be conventional military devices such as missiles and aerial bombs, or improvise devices such as large vehicle or truck bombs. Their potential for use by terrorist groups is extremely high, due to the fact that they have already been used on several occasions in the recent past. Examples of the use of such devices can be found in the incidents involving the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma, the World Trade Center in New York, and the bombings of two American Embassies in Africa. These types of devices are easy to manufacture, with the necessary components being widely available globally.

Who Is A Potential Target Of Terrorism?

The answer to the question 'Who is a potential target of terrorism?' is an easy one. Any individual, corporation, organization, government, nation or civilian population located on the globe is a potential target for terrorism. No one is absolutely immune from this type of violence, the very nature of terrorism assures that truth. At one time or another, entities from every sector of our society, as well as the global community, have fallen prey to the violence of terrorism. Buildings are bombed, planes hi-jacked, government and corporate officials are kidnaped or assassinated, nations threatened, soldiers and citizens murdered, etc, etc. Incidents such as these have occurred and will continue to occur, as long as groups or individuals choose to utilize terrorism as a method of airing their grievances. The problem exist in the fact that we can't accurately predict when and where the next act of terrorism will occur, or what the nature of the act will be. This reality is the underlying reason for the effectiveness of terrorism as a psychological, as well as physical, weapon. Even if you are not the victim of a direct act of terrorism, you're affected collaterally by the fear, anxiety, distrust, and uncertainty that an act of terrorism creates. And while it may be true that in general anyone can fall victim to an act of terrorism, certain types of targets present themselves as tactically more attractive than others. These include:

- Federal, State or Local government facilities
- Political or corporate officials
- Military facilities
- Public transportation systems
- Corporate and industrial facilities
- Public events
- Historic landmarks
- Educational facilities
- Public utilities
- Nuclear energy facilities
- Computer systems and networks
- Food or water supplies
- Consumer products

- Agriculture and livestock

Terrorist Target Selection

How do terrorists select their targets? The answer to this question is a little more complex then one might think. On the surface it would appear that incidents of terrorism occur randomly, as if out of the clear blue. News reports often refer to terrorism as random acts of senseless violence which, for the most part, occur for little or no reason. In reality, nothing could be further from the truth. Yes, while the victims of a terrorist act may be random, the act itself was not.

A terrorist is, in much the same way, similar to a common criminal. Criminal acts are also not random in nature. A criminal must possess the desire, the ability, and the opportunity to commit a crime.   Desire, ability and opportunity are therefore known as the elements of the crime, and their presence establishes some degree of pre-planning. Just as the criminal will conduct planning prior to committing a burglary, robbery, murder, car-jacking, theft, or any other number of crimes, the terrorist will plan a bombing, hijacking, assassination, etc. This process of planning removes the element of randomness in the act. What appears random to the average citizen is actually thought out in advance. Where randomness does play a part is in the fact that several terrorist incidents may have nothing in common with each other. The acts may have occurred at different times and places, may have employed different tactics, or were perpetrated by different groups for completely different motivations.

The intended target may or may not know the motivation for the attack prior to it happening. The terrorist may issue public statements or threats regarding his motivations prior to an attack, or wait until after the attack when responsibility is claimed. The terrorist may also never communicate the motivation for the attack, leaving us to wonder why? The motivations which fuel the terrorists act are many and can be simple in nature, or very complex. Motivations for committing terrorist acts include:

- The furthering of political, social or religious agendas
- Bringing public awareness to the group's cause or movement
- Creating panic, fear and distrust among a target population
- Destruction of industrial capabilities
- Revenge
- Morale building within the group or movement
- Financial gain
- Assisting with the defeat of an opposing military force

Selecting the right target will require the terrorist or terror group to conduct research and planning. The criteria used by terrorists to select their targets is composed of several elements. If the target fits the operational elements of this selection criteria, it may be chosen for attack. The selection criteria is as follows:

Accessibility. To be able to successful attack the target, the terrorist must penetrate the target's defenses. Does the target allow easy access to the terrorist?

Vulnerability. Even if the terrorist gains access to the target, is the target vulnerable to attack? Targets are generally categorized as either "soft targets" or "hard targets". A soft target is one in which the potential target employs lower levels of security measures. This type of target is considered easily vulnerable to the terrorist's attack. A hard target is one in which the potential target employs higher levels of security measures, making it more difficult to attack.

Criticality. How critical is the target in terms of the terrorist's object? Will attacking the target benefit the terror group, or result in obtaining the specific goals of the group?

Suitability.   Is the target suitable to the group's political or operational objectives? Who has the group declared as the enemy? Does this target represent the established enemy?

Recuperability.   How quickly can the target recuperate from the attack? The goal will be to disrupt the target's operation for the long as possible time.

Effect on the group.   Will attacking the target create the intended effect for the terror organization? Will this effect on the group be positive in the eyes of it's supporters?

Risk. What is the risk to the operational element conducting the attack? Can the terrorists escape after the attack? What is the risk of confronting police or government agents?

The degree to which each of the elements of the above criteria are applied will greatly depend upon the terrorist group's operational requirements. For example, if the terrorist group's plan calls for the suicide bombing of a target, then the risk posed to the attacker is of less importance than accessibility.   In general, it would be valid to assume that if a potential target fits the above criteria and the terrorist group is motivated then may fall victim to a terror attack.